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ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CHANGES OF COMMAND

BY

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AND
CHANGES OF COMMAND
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Colonel Michael A. Ellicott
United States Army

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ABSTRACT

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The culture of a military organization, by outlining the values, systems, and procedures that the unit uses to succeed, provides the commander with a powerful tool with which to achieve success. The incoming commander needs to understand what organizational culture is, how it functions, what it does, and how to change it in order to maximize individual and organizational success during his or her command tour.

Immediately following the change of command, a new commander, eager to accomplish as much as possible in the next twenty-four months, may ignore the existing culture and attempt to install familiar values, systems, and procedures that produced success in the past. While these cultural attributes may have worked in his or her previous unit, they may not be appropriate to or accepted by the new unit. A new commander will expend significant effort overcoming the resistance to change caused by the sudden shift in the organization's culture. Alternatively, the new commander can use the limited time and effort available to work within the existing culture, making changes where required, to achieve personal and organizational success.

INTRODUCTION

When General William Creech took command of the Tactical Air Command (TAC) in 1978, the aircraft sortie rate had been falling at an average rate of 7.8% per year for ten years. It took an average of four hours to get a deadline part to an airplane. By 1984, the sortie rate was growing at an average annual rate of 11.2% and the average time to get the part to the airplane had fallen to eight minutes.¹

General Creech did not achieve success with more people or more money. In fact, the number of dollars available for spare parts declined and the workforce was less experienced as skilled technicians left the Air Force in droves in the late 1970's. He achieved success through better use of the people he had. He made the aircraft TAC's "customer" and focused the organization's energy on providing the services necessary to get the customer to fly. Most importantly, he emphasized the importance of, and gave new authority to, the airmen providing "customer service." General Creech reversed the trend toward centralization and consolidation and returned responsibility to the flight line airmen. He succeeded by changing TAC's basic purpose and values. He changed the TAC's culture.

An organization's culture is the set of deeply-held, shared assumptions, developed from common experience, about the purpose

and values that produce success. As General Creech demonstrated, an organization's culture provides a commander with a powerful tool to enhance the effectiveness of the organization and its individual members. An understanding of what organizational culture is, what it does, and how it functions is essential to achieving organizational and personal excellence.

An organization's culture deals with implicit assumptions and values. As a result, it is the most difficult of the organization's four components (people, structure, systems, and culture) to identify, quantify, and control.² Culture "makes" the organization by providing a human dimension to unite the other three components. Culture provides purpose and instills organizational values, dictating the type of structure the organization adopts and the people it hires. Further, the organization adopts systems which support its purpose and values. Culture's role in unifying the organizational components makes it the most important component and requires that the leader devote significant effort to the management of the culture. Unfortunately, due to its implicit nature, culture is often the most neglected component.

In an organization with a strong culture, the purpose and values are widely shared and deeply held. The four components are mutually supporting in their effect on the organization's culture and performance. In an organization with an weak

culture, these beliefs are not widely shared and one or more of the components do not match the remainder of the culture. The organization may not be properly structured or staffed to achieve its purpose or organizational systems may not monitor or evaluate what the organization values.

As will be seen later in the paper, recent research into successful business and military organizations show the value of a strong culture. As a result, during a change of command, a key task for the incoming commander will be to create or sustain a strong culture. General Creech understood the power of organizational culture and used it to achieve success. Other new commanders can do the same.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The various elements of the culture combine to define what an organization must do to achieve success. "Assumptions" create implicit, unstated limits, constraints, and boundaries within the organization. The "purpose" defines why the organization exists. In military terms, purpose equals mission. "Values" provide guidance on what is right; what ought to be done. Values are the bedrock of the culture upon which the remaining elements are based.

The culture defines success in terms of purpose and values. The organization's structure and systems translate the culture

into specific relationships and actions to achieve its purpose and reinforce its values. Through the socialization process, the organization forms and retains a staff with similar views toward success.

The Army's professional ethic articulates the essential values of loyalty, duty, selfless service, and integrity and combines with the Army's values for the individual soldier of commitment, competence, candor and courage to form the foundation of the Army culture.³ Other values, such as command, combat arms, and a "Can Do" attitude are based on, and draw strength from, the Army's core values.

An organization's culture is not the same as its climate. All soldiers have expectations about what duty in a unit should be like. The climate of the command provides an indication of how well reality matches these expectations. The culture, however, focuses on the nature of those expectations. The climate is a measure of how well the organization's values fit with the individual soldiers' values.⁴

The organization's culture serves as an autopilot for its members.⁵ A shared view of the purpose of the organization combined with a common understanding and expectations about the values provide internal guidance that permits the organization to function without close attention. Like an autopilot, organizational culture focuses its energies on a few key

indicators of success. Continuing the analogy the commander, as the pilot, must continually monitor the "autopilot" (the culture) to ensure the organization's course and destination (values and purpose) are still correct. Additionally, the commander must continually reassess the culture to ensure it still fits the organizational purpose and that the culture still fits the external environment.

Additionally, the culture provides the structure and standards required to interpret events and make decisions for the good of the organization.⁶ Similarly, the culture fosters soldier identification with the organizational purpose and values, resulting in enhanced commitment and dedication. Commitment focuses energy on core missions and key values because committed soldiers make decisions on the basis of organizational rather than personal needs.

Organizational culture reduces the time devoted to internal communications and reduces the chances for misinterpretation. Since members of the unit share a common understanding of the purpose and values of the organization, it is not necessary to talk about them; they are taken for granted. Similarly, this shared understanding leads to common interpretation of the information being presented.⁷ The culture provides a common language for clear communication of mission, intent, and expectations for success by both leader and subordinate.

For a military organization, the most important result of a strong organizational culture is the empowerment of subordinates, a key concept of Air Land Battle. The culture provides a common set of decision-making assumptions that support organizational goals. Because subordinates generally agree on what is good for the organization, little time is wasted in determining the criteria for decisions and discussion moves directly to the merits of various options. Cultural assumptions reduce the ambiguity surrounding decisions, improving the quality of individual decisions, and improving the match between subordinate goals and organizational goals. Culture also reduces the ambiguity surrounding decisions involving two or more organizational values (such as loyalty and integrity) by providing a common understanding of their relative importance.

The advantages of empowered subordinate leaders are clear. The Air Land Battlefield requires bold, dynamic leaders capable of functioning independently within the context of the commander's intent. These leaders must be accustomed to responding to mission orders; orders that specify what and why but provide latitude, within implicit boundaries, on how to accomplish the mission. These leaders must also understand how the entire unit functions in order to synchronize the various elements of combat power. This requires the empowerment of subordinate leaders. "Powering down" significantly enhances the

combat readiness of the organization and a strong culture facilitates the empowerment of subordinates.

In the December, 1990 issue of Parameters, LTC (Ret, Faris Kirkland of the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research outlines his study of empowerment of junior leaders in the German invasion of France in 1940, the Japanese conquest of Singapore and Malaysia in 1941-42, and the Chinese intervention in Korea in 1950. His results confirm American and Israeli findings that a thoughtful and adaptive response to orders is far more effective than immediate and unquestioned obedience.⁸ This will be particularly true on the dispersed, non-linear battlefield of the future.

As a way of empowering subordinate leaders, Kirkland states; " A few officers of the US Army are currently experimenting with empowering leadership based on the concept that each act, word, and policy sends a message to their subordinates. They seek to behave in ways that convey trust, respect, and common purpose."⁹ These commanders are empowering their subordinates through a change in organizational culture.

Recent research into cultural phenomena in private industry and public organizations shows the benefits of strong organizational culture. The proven track record of strong culture organizations like IBM, Proctor and Gamble, and 3M in the private sector and The City of Baltimore and TAC in the

public sector show continued, long term growth well above the national averages.¹⁰ Both employee performance and organizational effectiveness significantly improve when a strong culture exists. Bennis summarizes the research by saying "...strong corporate cultures seem to be the driving force behind successful companies."¹¹ Deal and Kennedy point out that the Japanese productivity explosion results from the close match between the cultures of industrial, banking, and governmental organizations and the Japanese national culture. Japan created, in a sense, a national organizational culture.¹²

In their book In Search of Excellence, Tom Peters and Bob Waterman identified eight common characteristics of successful American businesses. They did not find a correlation between success and "hard" management skills and mechanisms. What they found were eight "soft" management traits which focused on developing and sustaining commitment and dedication between the organization's people (employees, customers, suppliers, etc.) and the organization itself by providing a sense of purpose and guiding values. Their research confirmed the importance of a strong organizational culture.¹³ The eight common factors provide an excellent list of the characteristics of a strong culture:

1. A bias for action. Successful companies get things done. They try it, modify it, and try it again.

2. They stay close to the customer. Their focus is outward, not inward. They listen to what the customer has to say.

3. They encourage autonomy and entrepreneurship. Though the companies are large, they keep subordinate units small and autonomous. They provide each entity with the resources and freedom of action required to succeed and hold the leadership responsible for the units' results.

4. Productivity comes from people. People are the company's most important resource and should be treated accordingly.

5. They are hands-on, value driven. The company's leaders are personally involved in the daily management of corporate values such as quality, service, and reliability.

6. They "stick to the knitting." Successful companies do only what they know how to do best and avoid diversification into unknown areas.

7. They have simple forms and lean staffs. The organizational structure (form) is simple and, by focusing their energies on a few key values, their staffs are small. They understand that the workers are the key to success of the company, not large staffs and multiple supervisory levels.

8. They have simultaneous loose-tight properties. The leaders exercise tight control over a few core values but allow freedom (looseness) on how these values are achieved.¹⁴

Other contemporaries found similar results ¹⁵ and Peters' later works expanded these ideas to public organizations such as the City of Baltimore and the Tactical Air Command discussed above.¹⁶

These eight characteristics describe an organization with a strong culture. A successful business has a shared purpose, a well defined function it understands; it "sticks to the knitting." Successful businesses all share several common values - action, customer orientation, entrepreneurship - and a focus on people. In addition they all focus on a small number of unique key values that describe the company's competitive niche - quality, service, cutting-edge technology, etc. Leaders of successful companies spend much of their time managing the culture and its values. Simple, lean organizational structures focus interest in only a few areas, promoting autonomy and entrepreneurship. It is the implicit, shared understanding of organizational purpose and values at the core of a strong culture that produces success.

Research into the characteristics of excellent Army units yields a similar bias for action, a concern for the individual soldier, and an emphasis on a few key values. A 1984 study by three Army officers of excellent units at Fort Hood, Fort Bragg, Fort Lewis, and Fort Ord found the following eight common factors:

1. Leadership by example. The entire chain of command led by action, not words.

2. A shared focus on combat. The units' energies were focused on preparing for combat and weren't distracted by other issues. As a result the members of the unit shared a common purpose and common values.

3. Power down. Subordinate leaders were trusted and empowered to act.

4. Strong unit identity. Everything the unit did reinforced their belief in being special and in being better.

5. Caring with a capital C. Excellent units took care of the soldier and his family as an integral part of readiness, not as an afterthought.

6. High standards and discipline. Doing things right became a unit core value. The unit focused its energy on excelling.

7. Teamwork, a way of life. The unit did everything together. Soldiers were committed to solving problems and overcoming obstacles as a unit. The unit took care of its own.

8. Consistent excellent performance. The unit demonstrated uniformly excellent performance with no peaks and valleys from ARTEPs to AGIs and beyond.¹⁷

Other research by the Organizational Effectiveness School^{18 19} and Dr. Reuben Harris of the Naval Postgraduate School²⁰ discovered similar characteristics of excellent units and their leaders.

Successful military units also demonstrate the characteristics of strong culture organizations. Combat, and the combat mission, provide military units with a clearly defined purpose. Successful leaders capitalize on this clarity of purpose by fostering such values as hands-on leadership, caring for soldiers and their families, high standards, discipline, and teamwork. They also focus on a unique aspect of the unit's mission or history to give their soldiers a special identity. The creation of a strong culture permits the empowerment of subordinate leaders and sustains consistent excellent performance.

High performance businesses and military units demonstrate the characteristics of organization with strong cultures. Many of the aspects of their cultures are similar, as outlined above. A strong culture enhances a business's productivity and a strong culture enhances a military unit's combat readiness. Strong cultures produce excellence and the leaders of excellent units understand how to shape and sustain a strong organizational culture.

At TAC, General Creech changed the organization's purpose from meeting internally generated measures of efficiency to getting airplanes to fly. TAC changed from a centralized, stovepiped, input-driven organization focused on internal measures of efficiency to a decentralized, output-oriented one

focused on an external measure of effectiveness, the aircraft sortie. More importantly, the organizational focus changed from "things" to people. General Creech made the airplane the "customer" and made heroes of the people who took care of his "customers" - the mechanics, crew chiefs, and ground support personnel. He moved the mechanics from the wing (brigade) level to squadron (battalion) level, assigned crew chiefs to specific aircraft, and moved the spare parts from a base-wide consolidated warehouse to squadron warehouses on the flight line. He also made a significant investment in improving the working and living conditions of the airmen and pilots who served his "customers".

In addition to a changed purpose, TAC's organizational values changed from centralization, consolidation, and uniformity, to decentralization, individual identity, and competition. Additionally, the leaders' focus changed from the high level, making sure the wing had the information it needed, to the lowest level, making sure the driver of the pickup truck delivering the repair part didn't hit a pothole and break down. Individual ownership of planes, trucks, buildings, and units became an organizational value with all the accompanying symbols (signs, patches, aircraft markings, etc.) having a prominent place. General Creech's cultural change worked because he knew that everyone wants to have their picture taken with "their" airplane and, as one of his NCOs told him, few people wash a rental car.²¹

ROLE OF THE LEADER

General Creech's success demonstrates that just as leadership is the most important element of combat power ²², leadership is also the most important element of the organization's culture. The leader's every word and action will, whether intentionally or unintentionally, have a direct effect on the culture of the organization. It follows that the leader's most essential role is that of shaping, sustaining, and (if required) changing the organization's culture.²³ While managing the organization's culture represents a significant responsibility, it also creates a superb opportunity for the leader to have a positive influence on the performance of his unit.

The leader can best shape the culture of his organization by providing a compelling, plausible, and attractive vision.²⁴ The leader's vision of success makes the organizational culture come alive; it provides an explicit manifestation of the culture for the organization to share. The vision shows the members what success looks like; the culture provides a framework for achieving that success.

Bennis describes the role of the leader as a pragmatic dreamer.²⁵ Not only must the leader have a vision of the future, but it must fit with the shared view of the purpose and values of the organization and be achievable. President

Kennedy's vision of a man on the moon by the end of the 1970's met these requirements. It fit with America's view of herself and, while it stretched the country's resources, it was achievable. American's value being "Number 1", fair and open competition, and high technology. Being the second country to launch a satellite and the second country to put a man in space did not fit the paradigm. Being first to the moon did. President Kennedy's vision of winning the technological race to put a man on the moon provided a compelling vision that Americans bought and supported.

Thus, the leader not only has to have a vision, he must portray it in a way that it is accepted by the organization as a desirable and achievable goal. The leader must "sell" the vision to the organization by clearly showing how the vision achieves the shared organizational purpose and supports the organization's core values. The vision must relate the purpose and values in a way that makes the leader's method of achieving success obvious and desirable.

Before discussing the mechanisms that can be used to "sell" the vision, one more key leadership role requires discussion. The leader's actions are more important than his words. Soldiers will pay more attention to what the leader does. They will assume that the leader's actions reflect his or her true priorities. All military leaders are aware of the requirement to be a role model, but the development of a strong culture

creates an extra requirement for actions totally consistent with the culture. Inconsistencies on the part of the leader will be magnified many times over in the inconsistencies of subordinates.

The organization's culture manifests itself through a series of symbolic acts and slogans that give meaning to the unspoken assumptions about organizational success. These symbolic manifestations provide an excellent method for the leader to sell his vision and will be useful in sustaining and changing the culture. Heroes and heroines convey organizational values in terms of the actions of real people that members of the organization can identify with. Stories and myths reinforce the historical dimension of the culture and help interpret events in light of past successes (or failures) in dealing with similar problems.

Ceremonies and rituals provide soldiers with an opportunity to celebrate success and remind them of the organization's values and of the importance of these values. The informal communications network stores the "folklore" of the culture and, by interpreting past and present events, provides a common understanding of the importance and effects of these events. In addition, the leader can use the network to convey his vision throughout the organization and to obtain feedback on its acceptance. Use of cultural mechanisms, rather than announcements or pronouncements, to "sell" a vision ensures that

it will be transmitted in an understandable form and will be interpreted in the context of the culture, greatly improving its chances for acceptance.

Changes of command, in themselves, cause stress for an organization and the soldiers in it. The departure of the old commander means the departure of familiar norms and expectations that the organization is either comfortable with or has adapted to. The unit may look forward to the arrival of a new commander, with a fresh outlook and ideas, while simultaneously experiencing anxiety over the future unknowns. The organization hopes that the new commander will correct all the problems they see but will not change the aspects of the organizational culture that fit their needs. Clearly the incoming commander is faced with an unrealistic set of expectations.

The typical new commander, anxious to "take charge" and accomplish as much as possible in the 24- to 36-month command tour may, intentionally or unintentionally, change many of the unit's values, systems, and procedures. Each new commander arrives carrying the baggage of previous experience, the cultural elements that produced success as a company, battalion, or brigade commander. The new commander's vision of success may involve rapidly putting into place the elements of the culture that worked so well in previous units. This vision ignores the existing organizational culture in the new unit. Initially, success will be based largely on how well the vision and the

existing culture match, rather than on the commander's leadership ability. Where the two match, the change will be accepted; where they conflict, change will be resisted. The force of the commander's leadership may be able to change the subordinates' behavior temporarily, but it won't change their basic values and assumptions. Cultural change requires more planning, effort, and time.

The nature and strength of the existing organizational culture will have a major impact on the new commander's ability to implement his or her vision of success. Rather than making immediate changes to the culture, the new commander should assess the existing culture to determine the degree of fit between the existing culture and the vision of success. Working with, rather than working against, the existing culture will result in a functional rather than a dysfunctional change of command. The organizational culture can provide momentum or inertia, depending on how the commander uses it.

ANALYZING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Because the organization's culture is wrapped up in implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions, it defies easy analysis. People rarely discuss their assumptions about how they communicate, interact, or decide. Rather, these assumptions are reflected in the actions, systems, rituals, and stories of the organization and its members. As a result, when

attempting to analyze organizational culture, the reasons why people do certain things becomes more important than what they do. The meaning behind their actions provides a better picture of the organization's culture.

One method of diagnosing organizational culture is to identify the key assumptions an organization must make to function and then identify places where these assumptions are most visible. After determining what to look for and where to find it, the investigation can focus on interpreting the data uncovered in order to understand the organization's culture.²⁴

In general, the key assumptions for any organization involve the work and the workers. First, an organization must decide what is important; what work should be done and how it should be done. Secondly, the organization must decide who should do the work (officers or NCOs, combat, combat arms, or combat support arms, soldiers or civilians, etc.) and what kind of performance gets rewarded and how (awards, promotions, time off, etc.).

For a military unit, many of these decisions are already made; the mission of the unit and the organizational structure are fixed. This situation makes the analysis somewhat easier, but each unit approaches combat readiness (purpose) in a different way. For example, the unit might be mission oriented, training oriented, or maintenance oriented. The unit must do

all three well to succeed, but the culture determines the core values of the organization and provides an implicit, common definition of combat readiness that members of the organization can understand and support. The new commander's cultural analysis revolves around discovering this common understanding of the purpose and values of the organization.

There are three places where the organization's key assumptions are most visible. First, the actions of the senior leadership, responsible for shaping and sustaining the culture of the organization, provide a wealth of information on the culture. What they do should reflect the organization's true values. Observe what gets discussed at meetings, what commanders personally do, and what reports get the most attention. Secondly, studying the selection, promotion, and rewarding of soldiers reveals what the senior leadership thinks is important and whether it gets rewarded. Observe what type of officer or NCO gets assigned to the choice jobs in the organization and, perhaps more importantly, observe the criteria and process used to select these soldiers. Finally, watching how the organization responds to conflict and crises reveals key cultural aspects. The dominant culture should prevail when the organization's leaders are forced to decide important issues involving conflicting organizational values.

There are two pitfalls to avoid in diagnosing an organization's culture. First, the strength of the culture has

an effect. A strong culture, widely shared by most members of the organization, will be easier to find and analyze than a weak culture. A weak culture lacks pervasiveness and sends mixed or confusing signals, not only to those studying the culture, but to those in the organization as well.

Second, any organization will contain cultural diversity; the "sub-cultures" and/or "counter-cultures" of subordinate units. Sub-cultures, if functional, allow subordinate units to focus their energies toward their part of the overall goal and foster healthy, internal competition. Counter-cultures can serve a useful purpose by providing a creative outlet for innovative individuals constrained by the dominant culture, they can show the limits of acceptable behavior, and in the extreme, can show the penalties for exceeding these limits.²⁷ Counter-cultures also provide a continual check on the validity of the dominant culture by testing the strength and appropriateness of the culture's basic assumptions. As long as these sub-cultures help rather than hinder organizational effectiveness, they are useful and can be encouraged as a method of sustaining the dominant culture.

The existence of these subordinate cultures make it difficult to identify the prime culture since the sub-cultures of these diverse groups will tend to mask the characteristics of the overall organizational culture. Again, focusing on why

people do things, rather than what they do, will help keep the dominant culture in focus.

Key subordinate leaders provide the best source of information on the culture of the organization. Their beliefs on things important to the organization will determine the nature of the culture.

These individuals should be questioned to determine what the organization thinks is important, what it devotes its time and attention to, and what it develops systems and procedures to accomplish. Clearly, each individual will provide slightly different answers to the questions, but agreement on several key aspects will provide a strong indicator of organizational culture. Again, it is important to watch to ensure that their actions match their words. In a strong, cohesive culture, the actions will match the words.

Individual responses should be compared to look for common denominators in the following areas:

Measures of success - Is success defined in the same way throughout the organization?

Backgrounds - Are successful individuals from the same branch, same unit, same kinds of assignments?

Stories - Are similar stories used to describe success or failure or to explain and interpret events?

Physical Settings - Are offices, work spaces, barracks, and shops sized, arranged, or equipped in a way to provide clues as to the nature of the culture?

Symbols - Are signs, markers, and patches uniform throughout the unit? Are photographs displayed and do they show people or equipment? Are they photos of individual soldiers or only of key leaders?

Peculiarities - Are there any quirks common to several individuals that indicate the culture?

The process will be an iterative one; the first round of conversations may result only in a general understanding of the cultural information uncovered. A second round may be necessary to focus on key cultural indicators. A third round may also be necessary to brief back an assessment of the culture to gain additional information or consensus.

Finally, information gathered during the investigation must be compared to the systems and procedures in place to determine if they reflect the stated values of the organization. For example, if information systems are in place to identify,

evaluate, and reward excellent performers, are the criteria based on what the organization says is important? If they are not, what do the systems provide information about? The time spent on developing an accurate picture of organizational culture represents an excellent investment in the future success of the command tour.

After assessing the culture, the leader must decide if the culture fits the needs of the organization (the vision) and determine if the existing culture helps or hinders achievement of organizational objectives. The goal of the leader must be to create and sustain a strong culture that facilitates the solution of routine problems at the lowest level possible and provides a framework for solving larger problems or resolving crises.

SUSTAINING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Sustaining the culture requires actions focused on people. The soldiers must be provided with a purpose and have the organization's values confirmed and reinforced. Additionally, the management systems and procedures in place must collect and evaluate information directly related to the purpose and key values of the organization. Finally, the recognition systems must recognize superior performance in areas important to the organization.

The symbolic manifestations of the culture discussed above are valuable tools for sustaining the culture.²⁸ Heroes and heroines exemplify extraordinary achievement by individuals the entire organization can identify with and can hope to duplicate. These need not be Medal of Honor winners; heroes and heroines can be the squad leader or tank commander scoring highest in unit testing, the supply sergeant with a better way of accounting for unit equipment, or the soldier devoting extra effort to excel when it would have been easier to do a mediocre job.

Ceremonies and rituals provide public opportunities to celebrate the achievements of heroes and heroines, both past and present. They serve as very visible reminders of the importance of cultural values and reinforce their importance. Stories and myths propagate the cultural heritage of the organization and help interpret current events in terms of the past culture.

"Culture reflects what has worked in the past."²⁹ As a result tradition, as depicted by the symbolic mechanisms above, plays an important part in sustaining organizational culture. Military leaders are experts on the use of tradition; we need only to look around to expand our concept of what "cultural heroism" is to be truly effective sustainers of the organizational culture.

The Army system provides a wealth of mechanisms for sustaining organizational culture. The OER Support Form and NCOER Counselling Worksheet provide a way to match individual and organizational goals. The counselling that accompanies the preparation of these forms creates numerous opportunities to explain, reinforce, and sustain the purpose and values of the organization. They also provide an opportunity to assess the strength of the culture and the fit of the various sub-cultures within the organization and provide excellent feedback on the match between the culture and the changing environment.

Programs to recognize outstanding units and soldiers are excellent vehicles for sustaining the culture. This provides an opportunity to anoint additional heroes and heroines, highlighting the rewards of superior performance in support of the organization's purpose and values. The formal recognition ceremonies that accompany the award create additional opportunities to reinforce cultural values. Care must be taken to ensure that the criteria for the award support the unit's values. In order to support the value of competence, the criteria for selecting the best combat squad or crew should focus on marksmanship skills, SQT performance, APFT score, and NCOES achievement and not on savings bonds purchases, AER contributions, and number of missed dental appointments.

Any opportunity to gather the members of the organization together should be viewed as an opportunity to sustain the

culture. The commander's presence at any event makes it important; commanders should be present at all important events. If a particular meeting concerns an important cultural issue, the commander should chair the meeting. The commander need not, and probably should not, make all the decisions. The commander's presence alone reinforces the importance of the event. Additionally, the commander can monitor the decision process to ensure the decision criteria, and the decision itself, match the organization's culture. If it does, subordinates feel they have the trust and confidence of the leader. If the decision doesn't fit the culture, the commander can use the opportunity to reinforce important cultural concepts.

CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Invariably the organization's culture will require adjustment; either a minor change or a major reshaping. In general, one of three situations force a cultural change: an unsuccessful unit, a change in technology, or a change in the environment. If the unit is unsuccessful, a rare occasion, the organizational culture no longer matches organizational objectives and must be changed.

More commonly, either a change in the environment or a change in mission will cause changes to portions of the organization's culture. Changes in technology, such as the

mechanization of a wheeled combat engineer battalion, force changes in organizational values. A change in the environment, such as the sweeping changes in Europe, will force a change in USAREUR's purpose from armored defense of Europe against the Soviet threat to that of a part of an international contingency force. The old values connected with a known combat mission and GDP must be reshaped to support the new vision of reality.

In each case, the basic Army culture founded on the professional ethic and individual values in FM 100-1 remains unchanged. These form a bedrock for various unit cultures to build on. Unit cultures form based on the environment, the purpose (mission), and the people involved. A major change in any of these requires a change to one or more cultural elements. All commanders should be aware of this phenomena and should be prepared to manage the change to ensure it fits their vision of success.

The mechanisms for changing the organization's culture are the same as those used to sustain it. In the case of cultural change, however, the vision becomes increasingly important. The vision for a cultural change must be carefully crafted in order to be as compelling, plausible, and attractive as possible. The vision must be "sold" by convincing the more respected members of the organization of the need for change and that the vision represents the best chance for success. Once they have bought

into the change, it will be easier to "sell" the remainder of the organization.

Successful culture change must do more than change member behavior. The use of a reward and punishment system alone can change behavior but leave the culture untouched.³⁰ The members of the organization adopt survival as a value and do the minimum required to survive. As a result, the leader must continue to monitor for compliance and adjust the rewards and punishments to maintain their effectiveness.

True cultural change results in the acceptance of changed values. If the culture changes to adopt a particular value, the organization itself performs the watchdog function. The leader has plenty of help ensuring compliance; most soldiers want to comply. Members who don't comply with the changed value are corrected or censured by the other members of the organization. This highlights another advantage of a strong culture.

Cultural change comes about through leader driven changes in three areas.³¹ First the leader must change his or her behaviors to reflect the new culture. The leader's actions must send the correct signals. Second, the management systems in place must be changed to collect and evaluate data on the changed values. Third, organizational structure may require revision to support the cultural change.

Finally, the people must be changed. In most cases, only additional education or training is required. In other cases, outsiders with new skills may be brought in. In extreme cases, members unable to adapt to the changed culture may be discharged. Just as hiring makes a strong cultural statement, a firing makes an even stronger statement about the organization's values. The commander should not pass up the opportunity to strengthen the culture by ensuring the cultural implications of the termination are understood.

The cultural mechanisms discussed above serve the same functions during a cultural change as they do in sustaining the culture. Heroes and heroines still personify exceptional performances that match the changed culture. Stories and myths still provide a historical interpretation for the changed culture. Ceremonies and rituals still provide visible opportunities for reinforcing the changed organizational values. The major difference between sustaining and changing the culture is one of emphasis. Cultural change requires more thought, more planning, more effort, and most of all, more time.

A final point on changing organizational culture. The change will always work better if the subordinates are involved in the planning and execution. This will ensure that the planned change is implemented in a way the organization can understand. Involvement of key subordinates from the beginning creates a cadre of soldiers committed to the success of the change. In

order to reinforce the value of empowerment, the commander should monitor the change process, rather than the change itself. In this way the commander demonstrates trust and confidence both in his or her subordinates and in the culture, strengthening both.

CONCLUSIONS

An understanding of and appreciation for the strength of an organization's culture provides commanders with a powerful leadership tool. Military units with strong cultures demonstrate significant improvement in combat readiness and empowerment of subordinates. In a time of volatile change in the Army's missions and environment, an understanding of the culture of the Army as a whole, and of each specific unit, will be the key to a successful transition to the next century.

The commander plays a key role in sustaining and changing the organization's culture. The leader's actions reflect the true values of the organization and shape subordinates' responses to events and their perception of what the boss wants. The leader's most important role involves the shaping of the organization's culture, the set of assumptions concerning the organization's purpose, values, systems, and procedures that produce success.

A strong culture creates and sustains units composed of proficient, motivated soldiers led by bold, dynamic leaders formed into well-trained and well-equipped units capable of quickly and effectively going to war and winning on the Air Land Battlefield. Such units exist now. Sustainment of strong organizational cultures through changes of commands will ensure that none of the battle-hardened capabilities forged in DESERT STORM are lost.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Army's senior leadership must understand the importance and benefits of a strong organizational culture. At the indirect leadership level, where leadership results more from influence than direct action, the ability of the culture to focus organizational energy becomes a key leadership instrument. Accordingly, the Army's senior leadership doctrine (FM 22-103 & DA Pam 600-80) must be modified to include expanded discussion of organizational culture. Such concepts as cascading translational processes, value-added leadership, and executive monitoring are more directly explained using organizational culture. For the same reason, instruction on organizational culture should be included in both the resident and non-resident Senior Service Colleges and Command & General Staff Colleges. The instruction should focus on the use of organizational culture, particularly during times of change. Future senior commanders should be sensitive to the organization's cultural

requirements during changes in mission, changes in environment, and changes of commanders.

Second, the Army's current downsizing represents a significant change in key organizational values. The SERB process will result in the premature termination of a large percentage of senior officers. Additionally a reduction in force will eliminate numerous quality officers and NCOs. These actions will profoundly affect the career expectations of the remaining officers and NCOs. As numerous posts are closed and units are taken out of the force structure, tradition and history will play a central role in resisting these changes. In order to be successful, decisions on who stays and who goes must be explainable in terms of the Army culture. In order to be understandable, these reductions must be related to the Army's values. We all understand why the reductions will occur; the Army's cultural values provides an excellent rationale for who gets eliminated. The senior leadership of the Army should use the culture to explain and conduct the process.

Finally, given the importance of the leader in developing and sustaining strong culture, command tours should be lengthened. Leadership stability is particularly important during times of change. Cultural change does not happen over night and successful change relies heavily on clear, consistent signals from the leader. Frequent leadership changes hinder, rather than help, the change process.

Lengthening the command tour from two to three years would not only benefit the unit, it would free-up 33% more high quality officers for other important jobs. To ensure the fair distribution of these officers and to provide an increased opportunity for upward mobility for high performing officers, the central selection process should be expanded to select officers for additional command-equivalent positions.

The Army leadership says that command opportunities are limited and that success is no longer defined by battalion or brigade command. Additional positions, such as DA or Joint Staff positions, Recruiting and ROTC Battalion command, newly established Army Acquisition Corps positions, all need top quality officers. In order to change the Army's culture to accept other than command positions as success, the Army's leadership must now ensure that their actions match their words, a key element of organizational culture.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Thomas J. Peters and Nancy K. Austin, A Passion for Excellence: The Leadership Difference, pp. 48-49 , 237-241.
- ² Howard Schwartz and Stanley M. Davis, "Matching Corporate Culture to Business Strategy," Organizational Dynamics, Summer 1981, p. 33.
- ³ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 100-1, pp. 22-23. (Hereafter referred to as "FM 100-1").
- ⁴ Schwartz and Davis, p. 33.
- ⁵ Alan L. Wilkins, "The Cultural Audit: A Tool for Understanding Organizations," Organizational Dynamics, Autumn 1983, p. 27.
- ⁶ Terrence E. Deal and Allen A. Kennedy, Corporate Cultures: the Rituals of Corporate Life, p. 16.
- ⁷ Vijay Sathe, "Implications of Corporate Culture: A Manager's Guide to Action," Organizational Dynamics, Autumn, 1983, p. 10.
- ⁸ Faris R. Kirkland, "Combat Leadership Styles," Parameters, Vol XX No. 4, December 1990, pp. 61-72.
- ⁹ Kirkland, p. 69.
- ¹⁰ Peters and Austin, Chap. 13,14, & 15.
- ¹¹ Warren Bennis, "Leaders and Visions: Orchestrating the Corporate Culture," Corporate Culture and Change, Conference Board Reprint No. 888, p. 63.
- ¹² Deal and Kennedy, p. 4
- ¹³ Thomas J. Peters and Robert H. Waterman, In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies, pp. 100-106.
- ¹⁴ Peters and Waterman, pp. 119-325.
- ¹⁵ Deal and Kennedy, pp. 1-36.
- ¹⁶ Peters and Austin, pp. 11-12, 225-226, 237-241.
- ¹⁷ Jerry A. Simonsen, Herbert L. Frandsen, and David A. Hoopengardner, Excellence in Combat Command, p. 18.

- ¹⁸ Jim Berg, "Profile of a High Performing Individual," OE Communique, No 2-1983, pp. 5-7.
- ¹⁹ Jim Berg, "Profile of a High Performing Unit," OE Communique, No 2-1983, pp. 8-10.
- ²⁰ Reuben Harris, "Excellence in Command," Conference Proceedings, Military Leadership and Future Trends, pp. 130-134.
- ²¹ Peters and Austin, p. 239.
- ²² FM 22-103, p. 1.
- ²³ Deal and Kennedy, p. 22.
- ²⁴ Bennis, p. 65.
- ²⁵ Bennis, p. 64.
- ²⁶ Wilkins, p. 29.
- ²⁷ Joanne Martin and Caren Siehl, "Organizational Culture and Counterculture: An Uneasy Symbiosis," Organizational Dynamics, Autumn 1983, pp. 52-55.
- ²⁸ This discussion generally follows Deal and Kennedy, Chapters 1 & 8.
- ²⁹ Schwartz and Davis, p. 35.
- ³⁰ Sathe, pp. 16-17.
- ³¹ Schwartz and Davis, p. 48.

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